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TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 3347

INFO RUCNIRA/IRAN COLLECTIVE IMMEDIATE

RUCNRAQ/IRAQ COLLECTIVE IMMEDIATE

RUCNISL/ISLAMIC COLLECTIVE IMMEDIATE

RUEHGB/AMEMBASSY BAGHDAD IMMEDIATE 0454

RUEHJI/AMCONSUL JEDDAH IMMEDIATE 7946

RUEATRS/DEPT OF TREASURY WASHDC IMMEDIATE

RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC IMMEDIATE

RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHINGTON DC IMMEDIATE

RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC IMMEDIATE

RUEKDIA/DIA WASHINGTON DC IMMEDIATE

RHMFIS/USCENTCOM MACDILL AFB FL IMMEDIATE

S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 02 RIYADH 008835

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DEPT PLEASE PASS TO NEA/I; NEA/ARP FOR BSHUKAN/SWALKER

E.O. 12958: DECL: 11/12/2026

TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [PTER](#) [PINR](#) [ECON](#) [IZ](#) [SA](#)

SUBJECT: FACILITATING GREATER SAG ENGAGEMENT ON IRAQ - A  
REGIONAL APPROACH

REF: A. SECSTATE 181228

[1](#)B. RIYADH 8254

[1](#)C. RIYADH 8721

Classified By: Deputy Chief of Mission Michael Gfoeller for reasons 1.4  
(b) and (d).

[1](#)1. (S) This constitutes Post's response to Ref A. The situation in Iraq remains of great concern to Saudis across the political, economic, and social spectrum. The press reported on November 13 that Saudi Minister of Interior Prince Naif called Iraq a "major base for terrorism," adding that the situation is "deteriorating daily" and stating that Iraq has become a threat to the entire region. Interlocutors at every level worry about the ongoing sectarian violence, the possibility that it could spill over into Saudi Arabia, and the long-term implications of increased Iranian influence. The SAG has consistently conveyed the same message during recent meetings with high-level U.S. visitors: what is in Iraq's best interests is in the best interests of the U.S., the region, and the Kingdom. The SAG continues to support U.S. efforts in Iraq, but does so in private meetings -- noticeably out of the public eye. Ever sensitive to negative public opinion regarding its relationship with the USG, the SAG is clearly balancing its role as a regional leader against any public support for U.S. efforts in Iraq.

[1](#)2. (S) Question: What would be required for the host government to be more actively engaged in Iraq? What will the host government require of Iraq before it is willing to increase support?

-- Response: The SAG has made it clear to us that Iraq remains a priority for it and that U.S. and Saudi objectives in this regard are in sync. It has actively engaged on Iraq, supporting, for example, the recent Makkah Conference (Ref B), meeting with Iraqi religious and political leaders, providing humanitarian assistance, participating in joint border and intelligence initiatives, and supporting the Iraq Compact (Ref C). Certainly stability will increase SAG engagement in Iraq on the political and financial fronts; however, its public stance has consistently been one of "non-interference," with officials stating that they will not -- and should not -- favor one group over another. We anticipate that, for several reasons, this will continue to be the case; at least in the near term.

13. (S) First, there remains some sensitivity regarding the SAG's perception that we did not "listen to them" on issues such as disbanding Iraqi military and security forces and de-Baathification. Our interlocutors rarely miss an opportunity to remind us of this charge. Additionally, the ruling family continues to be very averse to public criticism. In the wake of the Lebanon crisis, the SAG witnessed significant backlash by the Saudi public regarding its condemnation of Hezbollah's actions, as well as what was considered its support for unpopular U.S. policies -- in the region in general, but also regarding Lebanon. Overt support of U.S. efforts in Iraq, at a time when there is record-high anti-American sentiment in Saudi Arabia, is likely to generate a firestorm of criticism, and the Al Saud will go to great lengths to ensure that this does not happen.

14. (S) Financially, the SAG has committed at a political level to provide debt relief to Iraq. However, it is not being pro-active in engaging the GOI to clear up the key technical issues, especially the amount of debt outstanding. We are working closely with Embassy Baghdad to facilitate the debt talks needed to remove the technical issues. Once that happens, we believe further political level engagement will be needed to get the debt forgiven. In addition, the SAG has begun to engage in the Iraq Compact process -- sending representatives to the preparatory group meetings in Abu Dhabi and Kuwait in September and October. The Ambassador is talking to senior levels of the SAG about hosting an Iraq Compact ministerial in late November or early December.

15. (S) Question: What strategy should the U.S. Government take in engaging the host government in order to encourage

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greater support for Iraq? What specific contributions-- financial, political, security or other-- could the host government make to Iraq, assuming it was approached in the correct manner and at an appropriate level?

-- Response: Given the significant regional implications of the situation in Iraq, as well as the SAG's increasingly vocal desire to take a leadership role in the region, we should support a "regional" approach and encourage greater multi-lateral engagement. SAG officials have repeatedly stated that an "international approach" to Iraq is necessary and that the leadership must come from Saudi Arabia. For example, the Kingdom's shared border with volatile al-Anbar Province was a factor in its support for the proposed Gulf Cooperation Council's (GCC) Hudhud Remote Sensing System. Financial and political support of such multi-lateral efforts would be a safer avenue for the Kingdom to contribute to Iraqi stability without appearing to be a partner in the U.S. enterprise in Iraq.

16. (S) Also, there exist strong tribal ties between the Saudis and Iraqis. For example, the King's mother was a member of the Shammari tribe's ruling family, and Deputy Foreign Minister Yousef al-Saadoun is related to many Saadouns in both Sunni and Shi'a branches in Iraq. King Adullah clearly understands -- and uses to his advantage -- tribal networks in Saudi Arabia. We should not underestimate the power of such connections and strongly encourage the Saudis to leverage these ties to forward our mutual objectives in Iraq.

17. (S) Question: What are the host government's opinions on the relationship between Iraq and Syria? How will the host government perceive any change, either for the better or for the worse, in the relationship between Iraq and Syria? How could the host government be used to influence Syrian behavior toward Iraq?

-- Response: The SAG's opinions regarding the relationship between Iraq and Syria appear to be increasingly troubled. In part, that may be due to Bashar Al Assad's recent

statements referring to the Saudis as "half-men" for criticizing Hezbollah's actions during the Lebanon crisis. While prior to those statements the King pointed to Iran as leading the charge (where Iran goes, Syria will go), SAG officials are increasingly conveying that Syria should not be disregarded as a potential regional threat.

18. (S) Question: What are the host government's opinions on the relationship between Iraq and Iran? How will the host government perceive any change, either for the better or for the worse, in the relationship between Iraq and Iran? How could the host government be used to influence Iranian behavior toward Iraq?

-- Response: The SAG has been clear that it is concerned about Iran, its pursuit of nuclear weapons capabilities, and the fact that Iran is using Iraq to further its consistently stated objectives of expanding its influence. The SAG has also told us on numerous occasions that Iran is gaining ground in Iraq. The Saudis are extremely concerned about what they term the massive expansion of Iranian political influence in southern Iraq and view with suspicion Iran's goals there. Our Saudi interlocutors make no secret of their intentions to diminish and "roll back" Iran's role in Iraq.

19. (S) Saudi Arabia has been and continues to be a key strategic partner. The King and other senior members of the ruling family have repeatedly emphasized the importance of this relationship. However, given the current high level of anti-American sentiment in the Kingdom and throughout the region, the SAG clearly has to balance its public support of our efforts in Iraq against public/regional perceptions. It is critical that we understand this complicated dynamic and strongly encourage the SAG's efforts to forward a cohesive, multi-lateral approach that is regionally based.  
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